DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 786 HE 027 885

AUTHOR	McGuinness, Aims C., Jr.
TITLE	A Framework for Evaluating State Policy Roles in Improving Undergraduate Education: Stimulating Long-Term Systemic Change. State Policy & College Learning.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
SPONS AGENCY	Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	35p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427 (Order No. PS-94-7: $5 plus postage and handling; bulk discounts available).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Policy; *Government Role; Higher Education; Models; *Policy Analysis; Politics of Education; *State Government; *Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the shifting landscape of state roles in higher education and the public policy connections to quality undergraduate programs. The State Policy and College Learning project was initiated to generate state policies that would have a constructive impact on the efforts of colleges and universities to improve undergraduate education. A policy review was carried out in the pilot states of Colorado, Maine, New Jersey, Vermont, and Washington, to determine how specific policies or policy combinations contribute to or detract from organizational practices that support good practice. The pilot states then brought together political and higher education leaders to consider the results of the policy review. The project demonstrated that state issues and interests cannot be addressed in isolation; they must be a part of an examination of the overall, systemic impact of state policy on higher education. It found that each state's history, economy, and political culture are important determinants of higher education policies and practices and that state coordination is in transition. The report concludes with recommendations that states should engage in periodic, comprehensive evaluations of state policy and structure and broaden the array of policy scenarios and choices. An appendix contains the policy audit form. Contains 14 references. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 375 786

HE

A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING STATE POLICY ROLES IN IMPROVING UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

STIMULATING LONG-TERM SYSTEMIC CHANGE

State Policy and College Learning

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ECS

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE 027 895

EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING STATE POLICY ROLES IN IMPROVING UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

STIMULATING LONG-TERM SYSTEMIC CHANGE

State Policy and College Learning

Aims C. McGuinness, Jr.
National Center for Higher Education
Management Systems
Boulder, Colorado

A publication of the Education Commission of the States,
with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts

The **State Policy and College Learning** (SPCL) project was initiated by the Education Commission of the States, with primary funding provided by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The project was undertaken because of a strong concern that there are serious disincentives in higher education which diminish faculty commitment to teaching, particularly with regard to the impact of state policy on institutions. Countering these trends will require nothing short of a fundamental transformation of institutional, system and state policies regarding finance, governance and management. To that end, the project seeks to foster a new vision of the kinds of state policies that will support a resurgence of attention to creativity and innovation in college teaching. The content and opinions contained herein are the responsibility of ECS and do not necessarily reflect positions of The Trusts.

Copies of this book are available for $5.00 plus postage and handling from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427, 303-299-3692. Ask for No. PS-94-7. ECS accepts prepaid orders and honors organization purchase orders; **no credit cards**.

© Copyright 1994 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels.

Forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS central offices are at 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427.

It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

Postage and handling charges:	
Up to $10.00	$ 2.50
$10.01-$25.00	$ 4.25
$25.01-$50.00	$ 5.75
$50.01-$75.00	$ 8.50
$75.01-$100.00	$10.00
Over $100.01	$12.00

Generous discounts are available for bulk orders of single publications. They are:

10-24 copies	10% discount
25-49 copies	20% discount
50+ copies	30% discount

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD iv

INTRODUCTION 1
- Context for Changing State Roles 1
- Undergraduate Education: A Continuing Issue 2
- State Policy and Undergraduate Education in the 1980s 3
- Transition to the 1990s 4

THE PROJECT: STATE POLICY AND COLLEGE LEARNING 4
- Framework and Policy Review 6
- Characteristics and Expectations of Pilot States 8

UNDERGRADUATE AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE: FINDINGS 10
- Each State's History, Economy and Political Culture Are Important 11
- State Coordination is in Transition 12

LESSONS FOR STATE EVALUATION AND CHANGE INITIATIVES 16
- Conduct a Periodic Evaluation of State Policy and Structure 17
- Broaden the Array of Policy Scenarios and Choices 22

ENDNOTES 24

APPENDIX A 25

OTHER RELATED SPCL PROJECT PUBLICATIONS 27

FOREWORD

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) has a deep and abiding interest in America's colleges, universities and community colleges. In no aspect of higher education has this interest been more focused than on ensuring access and quality in undergraduate education, and on the state policies to support these important objectives.

Among the numerous ECS projects in this area, State Policy and College Learning may be the most ambitious. Supported for over three years by The Pew Charitable Trusts, this project drew from prior and ongoing work involving ECS, states and collaborating institutions and organizations. This work focused on making the relationships between state policies and undergraduate education more understandable and effective.

The project raised — and may still raise — many academic eyebrows. The list of project publications alone — to say nothing of the provocative topics — displays the boldness also characteristic of the project's work in five pilot states and its influence in many others. (A list of these publications follows this report.) This project laid the groundwork for an even more ambitious ECS higher education agenda, "Quality Counts: Setting Expectations for Higher Education . . . and Making Them Count," to be initiated in mid-1994.

Such boldness cannot be hidden in bland project reports. What you are about to read is dense, provocative and, I hope, constructively engaging. It is not so much about the project's history as about the shifting landscape of state roles in higher education and the public policy connections to quality undergraduate programs in particular. Special acknowledgement must be given to Aims C. McGuinness, Jr., who lived the project from its precursors to its conclusions and who authored this report. His new colleagues at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Dennis Jones and Peter Ewell, also contributed directly.

Numerous others contributed to this project including ECS president Frank Newman and vice president Kay McClenney, and Jim Mingle, executive director of the State Higher Education Executive Officers. Robert Schwartz and Ellen Wert of The Pew Charitable Trusts provided their ideas and guidance, as well as helping to secure financial support. Many other individuals contributed also, particularly those who participated in the project advisory group meetings. Most especially, ECS appreciates the interest and contributions of state higher education executive officers and their staff, institutional participants, ECS commissioners, state advisory group members and others without whom such a state-based project would not be possible.

Charles S. Lenth
Director of Policy Studies for
Education Commission of the States

INTRODUCTION

Context for Changing State Roles

Clark Kerr, speaking at a Wingspread Conference on the "Governors and Higher Education" in 1985, foresaw a return to the historic pattern of state dominance in higher education policy in the United States. He described the 1980s as the "Decade of the States," a decade when policy leadership would be dominated by governors, and when higher education could expect far more aggressive efforts aimed at connecting it to the states' social and economic agendas. The trade-off, Kerr speculated, would be improved state funding.[1]

The late 1980s confirmed Kerr's prescience about these conditions — except that the trade-off did not materialize. Stimulated by a series of national reports, virtually every state enacted policies aimed at spurring greater attention to undergraduate education. At work was a fundamental change, as characterized by Peter Ewell, from higher education being viewed primarily as a "public service" to being viewed as a "strategic investment." The focus shifted from issues such as student access and resource distribution across institutions to closer scrutiny of the return on the investment in higher education, particularly higher education's contributions to the economy and workforce needs. A new debate emerged focused around "investment for what purposes." While there were and are many answers to that issue, a concern for improving undergraduate education was the most common.[2]

By 1990, two-thirds of the states had in place mandates that colleges and universities assess student learning.[3] More than 30 states had enacted special funding mechanisms, several of which were designed to focus attention on undergraduate education.[4] Still other state initiatives involved changes in college and university missions emphasizing undergraduate teaching, increasing admissions requirements or establishing special faculty development centers to improve teaching and learning. New concepts concerning the appropriate roles of government-initiated reform appeared to be emerging, contributing to a gradual shift in the landscape of state roles in higher education that included such things as:

- Broadening the definition of "accountability" from primarily an emphasis on equitable access and efficient use of resources to an emphasis on performance and results.
- Decentralizing and deregulating state managerial controls, in return for accountability for outcomes.
- Establishing special competitive, performance or incentive funding programs designed to stimulate institutional realignment of priorities and resources.
- Using instructional technology and distance learning to stimulate new ways of delivering education with more effectiveness and less cost.
- Emphasizing public reporting of results to inform the "market" as opposed to relying on traditional internal bureaucratic means of accountability.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

State financial conditions changed dramatically in 1989-90. State fiscal crises, which had begun in the Northeast, soon spread to virtually every state. In addition, several key supporters of the higher education initiatives of the 1980s, such as Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey, left office. Accelerating political turnover meant that many of those who had authored earlier changes were no longer in positions to influence or implement new policies. The education reform movement intensified, spurred by the Education Summit of the president and governors in 1989. The resulting National Education Goals focused primarily on elementary/secondary education, but not to the exclusion of holding postsecondary education to higher performance expectations as well. Further, concerns deepened among both policymakers and the general public about the perceived lack of connection between higher education and the major issues facing society (e.g., the quality of the public schools, crime and youth violence). Policymakers became increasingly impatient with the slow pace and lack of consistency of institutionally-based reform measures, which was the predominant pattern of the late 1980s. Policymakers and the public lacked evidence that these changes were improving educational performance and began to demand more aggressive state actions.

Undergraduate Education: A Continuing Issue

Reflecting these and other factors, state policymakers' concerns about undergraduate education grew more intense and focused throughout the 1990s. Through years of trial and error, states have struggled to find the most appropriate ways to define and address their concerns. What makes undergraduate education so difficult to deal with in the context of public policy is that the underlying problems and issues are perceived differently from external and internal perspectives. Further, the apparent solutions to these problems do not fit the organizational structures established by colleges and universities to deal with their "core" instructional and research functions.

From the external perspective of policymakers, the term "undergraduate education" symbolizes a cluster of concerns about the performance of colleges and universities. Some concerns center around students — the adequacy of academic preparation for college work; time spent on remediation; and difficulties encountered in transferring among institutions and in getting access both to required courses and to senior faculty. Others focus on faculty workload and faculty commitment to undergraduate teaching. Additionally, policymakers often share perceptions that students take too long to graduate and that college graduates often lack many of the skills expected of college graduates. Attention to undergraduate education, at the heart of the new accountability, involves sharp questioning about the higher education system's performance and contributions to major societal priorities in return for the dollars invested by taxpayers, parents and students.

From internal campus perspectives — particularly in large university settings — undergraduate education represents a mission that runs counter to the prevailing cultures and reward systems. Many institutions lack ways to organize and manage "undergraduate education" when the dominant organizational structure and incentives are constructed around disciplines and professions. To serve undergraduate students requires a collective institutional strategy, but the dominant culture rewards

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

competitive performance related to individual faculty career and research objectives. Few incentives exist for faculty to focus on the "undergraduate experience." Because undergraduate education touches on all the issues embodied in the traditions of academic freedom and autonomy (e.g., the curriculum, faculty teaching assignments, expectations for student learning and a myriad of other matters), institutions and their faculties strongly resist external involvement.

State Policy and Undergraduate Education in the 1980s

The underlying assumption of many of the state initiatives in the 1980s was that policies designed to address the external agenda of undergraduate education could also stimulate attention to the internal agenda of institutions. A commonly heard statement was that "state policy can accomplish both accountability and institutional improvement simultaneously."

The cumulative experience of the 1980s raises questions about this assumption. First, states found it difficult to reconcile the external pressure for evidence of results and return-on-investment with the long-term, and comparatively slow, internal campus change process. State-mandated assessment, later reinforced by similar requirements embedded in accreditation standards, clearly stimulated widespread attention to assessment on college campuses; but the sum of campus initiatives did not "add up" to a coherent picture for policymakers of progress toward meeting external expectations.[5]

The internal change agenda took precedence over the external, public agenda. Campus resistance to external reporting of results, especially inter-institutional comparisons, led to state programs that allowed, if not encouraged, highly diverse, locally-driven assessment strategies. Consequently, campus response was uneven and dependent largely on campus leadership. The more the states pushed, the more the campuses responded with a "compliance mentality," implementing assessment programs "because the state made us do it," rather than because the initiative was central to campus change.

At the same time, many campus leaders did take advantage of the external initiative to drive internal change. In 1992, two-thirds of public institutions reported that they had state-mandated assessment plans in place.[6] But the extent to which assessment became integral to the institutions' strategies for improving undergraduate education varied significantly, with many assessment programs still operated as separate projects. Nonetheless, to the extent that these policies were intended to stimulate an institutional response to student assessment, the policies were a remarkable success. At the state level, also, assessment initiatives were often implemented as "add-ons" to current policy; in only a few states was assessment directly linked to the core state function of resource allocation, academic program review and approval or strategic planning.[7]

A second observation about the 1980s is that the majority of the special incentive funding programs were aimed at issues other than undergraduate education. When deliberately designed to do so, and when campus leadership took advantage of the opportunity, these initiatives did have a positive impact.[8] However, most of the special funding programs were for "centers of excellence," endowed chairs, research challenge grants and other initiatives aimed at linking universities' research capacity and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

prestige to economic development. In many respects, incentives ran directly counter to those needed to encourage more attention to undergraduate teaching.

Special funding to improve undergraduate education proved to be especially difficult to design and implement effectively. Some new entity or program needed to be set up, or the funds were dispersed over a number of institutional units. State initiatives seemed to have a positive impact only when incentive programs were designed to elicit institutional ownership of the underlying goals and when sufficient time was provided to connect the initiative with an internal change process.

A third observation about the 1980s is that both state-mandated assessment and special categorical or incentive funding were often connected to "a budget bargain"; that is, they were advanced and supported as part of deliberate strategies to obtain additional resources for higher education. In some cases, assessment programs were an explicit trade-off: "We'll give you additional funding if you can demonstrate that it will yield results." University presidents publicly supported special incentive funding just so long as it was additional funding after funding for salaries and inflation, not a reallocation of base funding. At least in some states, the "budget-bargain" strategy seems to have paid off.[9]

Transition to the 1990s

In the critical transition period of 1989 to 1991, many of the initiatives enacted just a few years before changed direction or were put on hold. Although assessment programs were retained in state statute and in state agency responsibilities, implementation was postponed in several cases. Neither institutions nor state agencies that had implemented the programs as "add-ons" could afford to keep them in place. In some cases, specifically New Jersey, funds for the assessment initiatives (along with staff positions in the state department) were eliminated because of opposition from institutional leaders who had objected to the initiatives from the beginning or who had been concerned about the state's approach to implementation. Under state fiscal constraints, most special funding programs were discontinued. Only those integral to the state's approach to budgeting and resource allocation were retained, such as the long-standing Tennessee performance funding program.

Despite these changes, the core concerns about performance and return-on-investment remained. A new generation of policies, some with origins in these earlier initiatives began to emerge. But now these were accompanied by a new and more penetrating questioning about the underlying efficiency of the enterprise. Questions about faculty workload and faculty commitment to undergraduate teaching dominated legislative agendas.[10]

THE PROJECT: STATE POLICY AND COLLEGE LEARNING

This was the context in which ECS initiated a multi-year project, funded largely by The Pew Charitable Trusts, aimed at developing a new generation of state policies that would have a constructive

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

impact on the efforts of colleges and universities to improve undergraduate education. The basic problem statement of the State Policy and College Learning (SPCL) project was as follows:

> Raising the education attainment of an increasingly diverse population depends not only on restructuring the K-12 education system but also on major improvement in undergraduate teaching and learning in colleges and universities. To meet rising demands in the face of severe fiscal constraints projected to last well into the next century, colleges and universities must undergo fundamental changes in modes of teaching and learning and approaches to management, finance and governance. But serious internal and external barriers can block these changes. Across the country, the communications gap is widening between political leaders who perceive that universities are unresponsive to major societal concerns, and universities and their faculties, many of whom are now making sincere efforts to change. The result can be policy actions and mandates that could further retard the very changes the political leaders seek. Bridging this gap and shaping a new vision of the role of government in creating a positive policy environment for significant improvements in undergraduate teaching and student learning are the major aims of the . . . project.

The basic approach of the project was to:

1. Develop basic concepts about the links between state policy and undergraduate teaching and learning.

2. Work with five diverse pilot states in applying these concepts in the context of addressing locally-defined issues in each state.

3. Identify barriers to constructive change and begin a dialogue between education and policy leaders as to how these barriers could be removed.

The project work was organized according to three elements:

1. Reviewing (if possible, by an external team) the impact of state policy on the incentives for undergraduate teaching and learning, and gaining the commitment of the five pilot states to convene the state's education and political leadership to identify specific ways to support long-term, sustained improvement.

2. Supporting projects and publications that brought fresh thinking to issues such as state policy roles and faculty work, incentive funding, performance indicators and other key policy tools of finance, governance, assessment and accountability.

3. Networking with state systems, colleges and universities, national associations and research centers committed to and supportive of the reform of undergraduate teaching and learning.

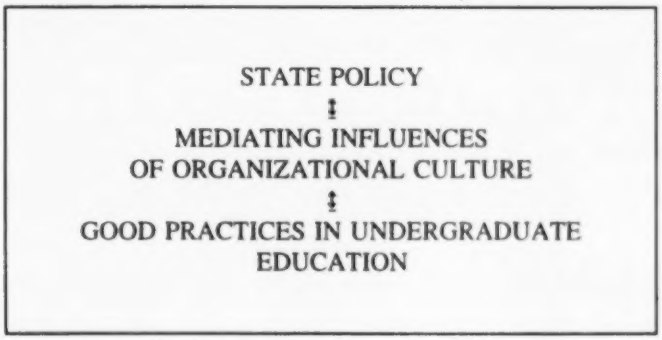
The pilot states were asked to use a common conceptual framework for examining the relationship between state policy and institutional change. This conceptual framework, as outlined

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

below, combined a "bottom-up" and "top-down" approach to analyzing policy implementation and effects. The states committed not only to gather and analyze information, but to support appropriate policy and effect changes based on that information.

Framework and Policy Review

The suggested conceptual framework for examining state/institutional relationships was set forth in a commissioned report by Peter Ewell and Dennis Jones, *The Effect of State Policy on Undergraduate Education.*[11] The framework is illustrated in the following figure:



As shown in this figure, the effect of state policy on undergraduate education — that is, on what actually takes place in teaching and learning — is largely indirect. "Good practices" in undergraduate teaching and learning include such conditions as high expectations for learning, coherence in curriculum, opportunities for active learning in the classroom, connections between what goes on in the classroom and other learning opportunities on the campus or in the community. "Mediating organizational influences" include the extent to which the institution's mission focuses on undergraduate education and whether the institution's policies and practices (e.g., the reward system for faculty promotion and tenure) support that mission. The primary impact of state policy is on the mediating influences; in other words, while state policies do not reach the classroom level to the extent of affecting active student learning, they can and do influence the extent to which institutions make commitments through mission and policy to foster active student learning. These interrelationships can be summarized as follows:

1. Much more is known than actually practiced about "good practices" that relate to student learning.[12] By implication, a public policy to improve undergraduate education should encourage institutions to adopt these practices. The aim should be to increase the proportion of the state's student population enrolled in programs with these characteristics.

2. Most of the "good practices" take place too close to the grass-roots level in the system (e.g., in the classroom) to be influenced directly or appropriately by public policy or other forces external

to an institution. In fact, even policies at the school or college level in a university may have only indirect impact. The most important factors that appear to influence whether "good practices" occur are the organizational culture and environment. In the project's conceptual scheme these were identified as mediating influences. These include such points as the extent to which the institution's mission stresses undergraduate education and whether this mission is reinforced by internal management practices. Especially important for undergraduate education are practices that reinforce interdisciplinary and collective action by faculty members in an environment that typically favors individual scholarship and disciplinary and professional isolation.

3. Public policy primarily affects these mediating influences. To increase the proportion of its students who experience the characteristics of "good practice," the appropriate roles of state policy involve fostering the kinds of organizational cultures and environments in colleges and universities that will sustain these practices.

These three points helped to shape the development of a self-assessment guide that states and institutions could use to examine the impact of state policy on undergraduate education. The guide provides a framework for examining how specific policies or policy combinations (e.g., mission definition, program review and approval, budgeting and resource allocation, assessment and accountability programs) contribute or detract from organizational practices that support good practice. (A copy of the guide developed for state policy evaluation is provided in Appendix A.)

This framework was used in carrying out a policy review (initially called a "policy audit") in the pilot states. The basic idea of this policy review came from Richard Elmore's work on policy implementation.[13] Elmore argues that analysis of policy implementation should begin from the "bottom-up" through "backward mapping." The traditional approach to such analysis begins with enactment of a specific policy (e.g., a new state law requiring institutions to assess student learning). Then the analysis follows about how that policy is implemented "from top to bottom," eventually determining the impact at the lowest levels of practice. The analysis tends to focus on the policy itself and defines success or failure in terms of whether the specific policy requirements are adopted at the level of practice or of service delivery. The emphasis, understandably, tends to be on means, not ends.

In contrast, through "backward mapping," the analysis begins at the level of practice, asking the question, "To what extent, if at all, do policy and other external influences support or detract from the underlying ends sought by policy makers?" For example, if the policy goal is to improve student learning, and if such improvement depends on certain characteristics of good practice, the backward-mapping analysis would ask to what extent the policy implementation actually fosters or detracts from these characteristics, and ultimately, leads to improved student learning.

Initially, pilot states and institutions were asked to undertake the policy review on a self-study basis; subsequently, the process was formalized in a policy review by external consultants in several of the pilot states. This proved to be an unsuccessful strategy. Institutional constituencies found it difficult to distinguish between internal and external (e.g., system or state) policies in their efforts to determine positive and negative impacts on efforts to improve undergraduate education.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In the formal review process in these states, these steps were followed:

- Background materials on state policy (legislation, agency policies, master plans, implementing regulations, etc.) were gathered and analyzed.

- Working with an advisory group of institutional and state representatives, the consulting team selected a representative group of institutions to be included in the review.

- The team visited each selected institution for interviews with faculty representatives and key administrators. The team also conducted interviews with important persons at the state level, including the governor's education aide, legislators and legislative staff, other executive branch agencies (if appropriate) and leadership of the state higher education agency.

- Draft reports were then prepared which integrated the findings from both the institution and the state levels. The reports summarized the overall state policy context, reviewed findings regarding policies that were either helpful or hindering and outlined recommendations for changes in state policy.

- Each state's draft report was then reviewed by the advisory group to verify the accuracy of the findings and to obtain advice on how the document could be used most constructively in an effort to improve state policy.

Characteristics and Expectations of Pilot States

The pilot states (Colorado, Maine, New Jersey, Vermont and Washington) reflected reasonable geographic distribution and, more importantly, distinct differences in coordinating and governing structures. Maine and Vermont have consolidated governing board structures, while Colorado, New Jersey and Washington have relatively decentralized institutional governance within the framework of statewide coordination.

Within these structures, the states also displayed various approaches to undergraduate education issues in the 1980s. Maine and Vermont had approached these issues primarily from within their college and university systems; that is, the issues were defined and policy changes generated from within the existing state/institutional relationships. Colorado, New Jersey and Washington had established assessment programs. In New Jersey, a multi-component assessment initiative and incentive funding programs were established, all of which reflected some definition of the issues and policy approaches from outside the college and university environments.

Participation of the five pilot states also was based on willingness of key state and institutional leaders to participate in the project and their readiness to link the project to ongoing policy initiatives. For example:

- In Colorado, the Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) was updating its master plan and undergraduate education was a key issue in that process. There were also growing concerns about the adequacy of the state's higher education structure.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- In Maine, the project fit well with the efforts of the chancellor of the University of Maine System to promote sharing of information among the eight campuses on improving undergraduate teaching and learning through annual systemwide conferences (the ongoing Sugarloaf conferences). Also, Maine Governor John McKernan, who was chair of ECS at that time, had a direct interest in the project.

- In Vermont, the project was linked with an effort of the chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges to improve the climate for teaching and learning through a Futures Task Force. Of particular interest were the efforts to engage the system's faculty union leadership in the dialogue.

- In New Jersey, the Board of Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education were just beginning a new strategic planning process.

- In Washington, the project was linked with the update of the master plan by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

In the first project phase (December 1990 - June 1992), each pilot state was asked to undertake three activities. First, the states were asked to use the policy review process as a framework for assessing the impact of policy on the conditions that support undergraduate teaching and learning. This was to be done largely on a self-study basis. Second, the states were asked to obtain political as well as institutional participation in a state-level dialogue about the results of the policy review. Finally, they were requested to report the results of this process to ECS at the end of the project period along with information on how the process led to new thinking about policy alternatives.

Two points soon became clear. It was difficult for states to undertake the policy review on a self-study basis. Results from institutions were uneven, and participants were reluctant to raise serious questions about the efficacy of state actions. Even the words "state policy" had widely varying meanings to the participants; those at the institutional level could not clearly distinguish between policy that originated within their institutions as opposed to other levels of the system.

In phase II (beginning in July 1992), a more structured approach was taken. States were asked to engage in two processes: (1) reviewing policy and (2) bringing together political and higher education leaders.

In Colorado, Maine, New Jersey and Washington, a policy review was undertaken by external consultants, resulting in a draft discussion document on the impact of state policy on undergraduate education. The documents provided a commentary on the overall state culture for higher education policy; specific findings regarding the positive and negative impacts of state policy; and recommendations for improvement. With the goal of bridging political and higher education leadership, the consultants sought to convene both higher education and political leadership on a more formal basis to consider the results of the policy review.

The project confronted several practical considerations in trying to implement this kind of process in five very diverse states. First, the process had to be adapted to the unique circumstances in

each state. Ad hoc structures, consisting of working advisory groups from the institutions and state agencies and steering committees of political and higher education leaders, were attempted in Colorado and New Jersey. The isolation of these groups from ongoing decision processes limited their effect. In Maine, Vermont and Washington, existing mechanisms were used.

Second, because the results of the policy review and the potential involvement of political leaders in the dialogue were unsettling to some parties, it was difficult to accomplish the "bridging" process. As discussed in the following section, the lesson suggests the need for both independent sponsorship and expertise combined with staffing within a state to accomplish a rigorous evaluation of state policies and to get the resulting funding discussed among pertinent audiences.

Third, both timing and a sense of "felt need" are critical to the success of this kind of effort. Whether these exist in any given state at the optimum time is unpredictable. In Colorado, for example, initially it was difficult to get attention to the results of the policy review among the state's leaders. The project did succeed, however, in becoming one catalyst for establishment of a major, multi-year initiative called "Agenda 21: The Future of Education in Colorado." In New Jersey, a hotly contested gubernatorial election meant that the project was put on hold after the policy review was completed. But the project materials were later used by the new governor's transition team in the subsequent debate about a major restructuring of the state's role in higher education. In Washington, the project continues to play a behind-the-scenes role in shaping a new relationship between the state and higher education — what the new master plan recommended as a "new compact" between the state and higher education. In none of these cases, could these impacts have been planned specifically or even predicted. A more rigid project schedule and framework could have foreclosed various opportunities.

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE: FINDINGS

The experience of attempting to stimulate change within several states through a national project yielded valuable insights into the specific topic of state policy and undergraduate education, and also, the broader challenge of evaluating the adequacy of state policy for the next decade and beyond.

The project demonstrated that state issues and interests involved in providing high-quality undergraduate education cannot be addressed in isolation; they must be a part of an examination of the overall, systemic impact of state policy on higher education. The uniqueness of each state must be recognized in the nature and adequacy of the structures used to manage the relationship between the internal priorities of colleges and universities, and the external expectations of the public and policymakers. The project's findings on these points are summarized in the following sections.

Each State's History, Economy and Political Culture Are Important Determinants of Higher Education Policies and Practices

A state's political, economic and cultural characteristics define the context for state relations with higher education. These are developed over decades and deeply embedded in the way states do business. These characteristics also help to define the possibilities for, and the limits of, change in the existing relationships and policies. Among the pilot states, the following differences were most pronounced:

- Population characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, geographic dispersion).
- Political culture. [All the states face strong regional tensions that play out in higher education policy. New Jersey has a strong labor tradition; the western states, on the other hand, have long-standing populist traditions that lead to greater involvement of political leaders in setting higher education policy.]
- Public attitudes related to the role of state government and taxation. [All the pilot states face strong public reactions against increased government spending.]
- Relative strength of the governor and state legislature. [New Jersey is a "strong governor" state; Colorado is a "strong state legislature" state. In the other pilot states, the governor and legislatures play roughly balanced roles in the policy process.]
- Proportion of total higher education enrollment in public higher education. [Maine, Vermont and New Jersey have stronger traditions of independent higher education than do Colorado or Washington.]
- Proportion of public enrollment in two-year institutions. [Washington has a greater proportion of its enrollment in community colleges and branch campuses than do the other four pilot states.]
- Relative direct involvement of state government (e.g., the governor, legislature and non-higher education agencies) in higher education policy. [In the states of Colorado, New Jersey and Washington, in contrast to Maine and Vermont, the governor, state legislature or non-higher education departments (e.g., the state civil service personnel department or purchasing departments) play important roles in higher education policy.]
- The nature of institutional governance (e.g., degree of centralization or decentralization). [In all the pilot states, governance is fairly decentralized, although in Maine, Vermont, New Jersey and Colorado, a number of the institutions are within multi-campus systems.]
- Extent of formal, statutory statewide coordination in addition to institutional governance. [Coordinating structures are most fully developed in Colorado, New Jersey and Washington. Only voluntary coordination exists in Vermont beyond the Vermont State Colleges and the

University of Vermont. Maine has a single governing board with a small system-level administration.]

These points underscore that each state requires its own individually tailored approaches to bridging the perspectives of the state or system and higher education institutions. Policies must be adapted to meet these unique circumstances, and mismatches (which are common) often contribute to policy failure. New policy ideas — performance indicators, assessment mandates, incentive-funding schemes, faculty workload mandates — cannot be imported and applied without adaptation to these conditions. Because of the highly fragmented nature of some legislative processes, these ideas can move through to enactment with virtually no analysis of how they might fit the state or, for that matter, whether they might duplicate or contradict existing statutes.

State Coordination is in Transition

Three of the pilot states — Colorado, New Jersey and Washington — have statewide coordinating boards with statutory authority and responsibility for planning, regulation and program implementation. Institutional governance in each of these states is the responsibility of several single-institution or multi-campus governing boards. In all three states, undergraduate education has been a major policy concern for more than a decade.

Despite this extended period of concern, in Colorado and New Jersey — and to a much more limited extent, in Washington — state policy and practice are falling short of both the external expectations and the internal agenda for improving undergraduate education. The policies reviewed did not fully reflect the expectations or have the ability to effect the changes expected by the external higher education constituencies or by those forces working to accomplish change within the institutions.

The following points were observed in varying degrees in each state, but especially in Colorado and New Jersey. Several of these characteristics appeared to inhibit the formulation or limit the effectiveness of higher education policies in the pilot states, including:

- **Too much emphasis on uniformity and consistency.** In the states in which formal policy reviews were conducted, a one-size-fits-all approach to policymaking clearly was evident. Such an approach detracts from efforts to develop policies that reflect population diversity and to promote initiatives for the improvement of undergraduate education. Examples include uniform application of state civil service requirements across all public colleges and universities; strong pressure for across-the-board resource allocation or expenditure reductions; and strong resistance to targeting of enrollment increases or special incentive funding.

- **Inability to articulate a coherent long-term agenda.** In each of these states, the policy formulation process is shared by the governor, legislature, the state higher education agency and other major parties. Agendas are usually framed in terms of means, not ends. The term "undergraduate education," when used as a catch-all for concerns about the higher education system, often leads to a series of "fixes" to specific problems (e.g., increased admissions requirements, mandates that faculty spend more time teaching undergraduates). Lacking is any

explicit statement of the state's goals regarding the education attainment of the population, of the level of knowledge and skills needed by this population to participate in and contribute to the state's economy and civic life, or of the role that colleges and universities should play among other institutions in meeting these needs.

- **Absence of information.** The state agendas typically were focused on short-term economic and political considerations. With the increasing turnover of legislative leadership, it has been increasingly difficult to find political leadership with a perspective of how state higher education policy has evolved over a number of years and legislative sessions. Short-term responses to immediate political or economic considerations tend to dominate the state's agenda. In contrast, to improve undergraduate education substantially requires sustained political leadership.

  In addition, state agendas for undergraduate education are established with limited information and analysis about current conditions or long-term needs, for example, without much analysis of participation and completion rates in relationship to the state's workforce needs. Such fundamental issues rarely arose or were addressed in the formulation of the state's agenda for undergraduate education.

- **The defensive nature of policy.** The states (including not just the higher education boards, but other agencies as well) tended to emphasize "preventing bad things from happening" rather than deliberately stimulating positive responses. This "mind-set" resulted in a pervasive negative cast to state policy. In most cases, the resulting policies arose from isolated instances of student problems (e.g., the inability of students to transfer from one institution to another or to get into courses required for graduation); from fears that too many out-of-state students would be accepted; or from concerns that institutions would admit more students than budgeted and expect the state to make up the difference.

- **Diminishing agency capacity to lead the state's higher education agenda.** Several state coordinating boards, particularly those in Colorado and New Jersey, were severely burdened by statutory obligations to enforce regulations and implement programs accumulated over the years through actions of successive governors and legislatures. In some cases, legislatures enacted new policies on top of, and with no connection to, existing policies (e.g., a new policy on performance indicators would have no connection to an existing assessment mandate or an existing requirement that institutions report on minority student access, retention and completion). In other cases, an agency thought it had an obligation to "protect the public interest" through continued oversight, even though the state had deliberately delegated responsibility and authority to the institutions.

  Often, coordinating boards seemed to lack the means and the recognized role to raise questions for public debate about the long-term consequences of short-term solutions. For example, separate decisions are made on admissions policies, tuition policy or student financial aid, and enrollment caps without an assessment of the short- and long-range impacts on the state's population and without a recognition that such policies often were working at cross purposes.

  Finally, the boards lost credibility in bridging political and education perspectives, especially on issues such as undergraduate education. Inconsistency was a special problem. At one point the agency may be seen primarily as an extension of the political leadership responding to the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

political demands. At other times, the state agency was seen as an advocate of the institutional perspective, without assuming responsibility for bridging the two viewpoints.

- **Uncoordinated, inconsistent policy implementation.** Rather than multiple, new policies, often a better strategy involves the appropriate use and combinations of existing policies, and more care in policy implementation. This was particularly apparent in Colorado and New Jersey in examples such as:

  - Policies implemented without an obvious underlying understanding of how institutional change takes place. Lack of adequate understanding was especially evident on initiatives related to undergraduate education. As found in the late 1980s, state assessment policies implemented too quickly without sensitivity to institutional change spawned a "compliance" response and increased the chances that the state initiative would not become a catalyst for change.

  - Policies aimed at specific problems (e.g., minority achievement, faculty workload, student retention and completion, and transfer and articulation) implemented separately with little attention to their combined effect on a single institution.

  - Limited efforts to achieve policy coherence. Links between strategic planning and budgeting and the agency's substantive agenda related to undergraduate education were rare.

- **Inconsistent and disconnected financing policies.** Sporadic and disconnected policy initiatives were particularly apparent in the area of finance. Examples include:

  - Special incentive funding programs that conflict with the underlying incentives in the largest part of the budget (e.g., a special incentive program for undergraduate education added on top of a base budget that rewards institutions focused on research and graduate education).

  - Frequent changes in financing policy that undermine long-term change and discourage careful implementation (e.g., failure to continue special incentives for improving undergraduate education for more than one year).

  - Accountability mandates disconnected from the state planning and budgetary requirements (e.g., performance indicators that were implemented with no connection to pre-existing assessment policies or with no clear connection with the budget process).

  - Lack of coordination of financing policies that affected student access, retention and graduation (e.g., tuition policy, student aid, admissions policy, enrollment policy and institutional subsidy). The net effect gave mixed signals to both students and institutions about state priorities.

- **Ineffective roles for consolidated or multi-campus systems.** In the smaller states of Maine and Vermont, the arena for formulating and implementing policy related to undergraduate education is largely within the multi-campus systems: the University of Maine System and the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Vermont State Colleges. Both these systems appeared to do well in establishing the conditions necessary for sustained attention to the internal, substantive agenda for improving undergraduate education because of their relatively small size, comparatively homogeneous student population (although both systems have diverse student bodies in terms of age and economic status), and ability to withstand changes in state political leadership or state priorities. Both these systems made extensive use of formal and informal networks among campuses to support efforts to improve teaching and learning. And both appeared especially sensitive to the role that campus culture plays in supporting undergraduate education.

At the same time, neither of these states was seriously challenged by an external agenda driven by the governor, state legislature or the media. Informal, largely voluntary networks appeared to connect the higher education community with the state's political leadership and the public at large. What appeared lacking was a mechanism to develop the kind of public concern and agenda for higher education that was apparent in Colorado, New Jersey and Washington.

There were, however, potentially more serious problems in the large multi-campus systems in Colorado and New Jersey. In the policy review process, campus-level contacts frequently cited policy barriers to improving undergraduate teaching and learning that were the result of the system's policies rather than state policies. These included:

- Failure to reinforce different institutional missions through suitably differentiated policies on faculty promotion and tenure and incentives for undergraduate teaching.

- A system tendency toward "one-size-fits-all," which inevitably imposed the values of research and disciplinary focus on campuses where undergraduate teaching was the primary mission.

- Faculty pressures for "shared governance" leading to a steady rise of campus issues to the level of the system and tending to impose the values of one unit on another.

- The lack of clear definition of the roles that the system could play in reinforcing campus initiatives on undergraduate education, such as providing special financial incentives, convening systemwide faculty development seminars, providing technical assistance on assessment and other topics.

Because of the size of these multi-campus systems, state policy developed by the legislature or state coordinating board was easily deflected or nullified unless the system itself was committed to internal changes that complement those of the state. This underscores the point that since 80% of the enrollment in public higher education (more than 60% of all enrollment, public and private) in the United States is now in large multi-campus systems, states will have to hold large systems accountable for the kinds of internal changes that only they can design and implement.

- **Lack of periodic evaluation.** The process used by the SPCL project was, in a sense, an independent evaluation of a state's higher education system. In all the pilot states, there was no pre-existing means for regular evaluation, and political and economic uncertainties made the existing state entities reluctant to engage in open debates for fear of exacerbating an already unstable situation. In Colorado and New Jersey, the coordinating agencies might have been able

to play that role at one time, but seemed to lack the credibility to do so during this project period. In Washington, there was hesitancy in moving to the next steps beyond the periodic master planning process.

The existing higher education structures appear oriented primarily toward overseeing the interaction between the institutions and the governor, executive branch agencies and the legislature. Major differences in expectations existed not only between government and higher education, but also between higher education and the general public. In none of the pilot states did the state agencies or boards play a major role in attempting to bridge this gap.

In summary, the picture that emerged suggests that current state policies fall far short of what was and will be needed to stimulate and support change on an issue as complex as undergraduate education. Change on such an issue requires sustained attention with care both to the subtleties of institutional change as well as the need for clearer public expectations. There are, clearly, exceptions to this picture, but many of the lessons of the 1980s remain valid for today and are generalizable to other states. Given the increased public demands for performance and the likely severe economic conditions in the late 1990s, states may need to re-evaluate their higher education policies and strengthen the capacity to reconcile conflicts between the external and internal expectations regarding undergraduate education.

LESSONS FOR STATE EVALUATION AND CHANGE INITIATIVES

Two realities shape the current context and will do so for the remainder of the decade and beyond. Many states are experiencing escalating demand for higher education's services, reflected at the undergraduate level by higher expectations about what graduates should know and be able to do, and complicated by the complexity of the student population. Unfortunately, this reality is coupled with another — projected long-term fiscal constraints driven by relatively slow economic growth, competing demands in other areas of social policy, taxpayer resistance to tax increases, and growing parent and student objections to tuition increases.

If the methods of delivering postsecondary education do not change to serve more students at a lower cost, while simultaneously meeting expectations for quality, large numbers of current and potential students may not be accommodated in the system. Particularly affected will be the nation's growing minority population. The capacity of higher education to contribute to societal priorities outside education may also suffer.

As states and institutions attempt to face the twin realities of increased demand and limited funding, three other conditions will complicate their task:

1. **The sense of a need for change may not be as intense as it is for the K-12 system.** Polling data suggest that the public views higher education differently from primary and secondary

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

education. There are serious concerns at the K-12 level about the effectiveness of schools in producing graduates with acceptable levels of knowledge and skills. While much of the public sees the K-12 system in serious trouble and in need of fundamental restructuring (standards, curriculum, financing and governance), it views higher education in a generally positive light. Getting a college degree is seen as increasingly important for getting and keeping a job. But underlying this favorable response are potentially serious problems. Access to a credential appears to be more important that the knowledge, attitudes and skills one might gain from an undergraduate education. The public fears that the possibility of obtaining a college credential is steadily slipping away and perceives that ineffective management is contributing to rising costs and lack of affordability.[14]

2. **A sense of urgency may be lost as economic recovery leads to a return to increases in state higher education funding.** While hard economic times have served to highlight some important problems, even the smallest increases in funding likely will lull some into believing that the current crisis is only an aberration. The case for change will only be possible when long-term resource trends are contrasted with estimated demands.

3. **Other priorities are likely to capture political leaders' attention and time.** While political leaders may have concerns about higher education, they tend to be minor irritants compared to the crisis in health care, crime and public school reform. Trying to make the case that higher education needs as much attention as these other areas will fail or backfire. Arguing that higher education's problems are part of the solution makes more sense but may lack political salience.

The changes needed to respond to these realities involve fundamental shifts in the manner in which individual colleges and universities function. But the changes must also encompass entirely new thinking about the system as a whole. New strategies are needed to communicate and connect with the general public about the underlying purposes and potential benefits of higher education to society as a whole as well as to individuals. Efforts to gain public support for, and understanding of, the needs of higher education will be required. In addition, new connections are needed between and among colleges, universities and schools. New roles for employers and responsibilities for students themselves must be redefined. Changes of this scope will be difficult to accomplish unless stimulated and supported by a positive public policy environment.

Several lessons learned in the context of this project suggest steps that contribute to the creation by such an environment.

Conduct a Periodic Evaluation of State Policy and Structure

The experience and findings of this project suggest the need for change in state policy perhaps as fundamental as any contemplated for the higher education enterprise itself. This assertion, in turn, suggests that a state engage in a periodic, comprehensive evaluation of its higher education policies and structures.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The project findings underscore that timing and a sense of "felt need" are critical to this kind of effort. The following two conditions most often are the catalyst for major independent evaluations:

- A major external crisis (most often a funding crisis) or a major non-education event that galvanizes public attention on the need for change.

- Key leaders who have a vision of why and how the state must change and who have the skill, self-confidence and credibility to take advantage of the sense of crisis to set the process in motion.

In cases where these key conditions are present, the long-term impact is likely to be heavily influenced by whether:

- The process has the backing of different stakeholders, including legislative and executive branches, political parties, regions and major higher education sectors (many of whom may have conflicting expectations). The impact can be seriously limited if the process is seen as the agenda of one board or individual.

- The key stakeholders are committed to a process that will address fundamental, long-term change, as opposed to the immediate issues raised by the current crisis.

When the catalysts of crisis and leadership are not present, there may be no sense of "felt need" on which to base the case for change. Because of the comparatively positive public views of the higher education enterprise compared to K-12 public education, the case for change probably cannot be made on the basis of the failure of the higher education system. A case can be made, however, based on the gap between future demand for higher education, on the one hand, and likely capacity to meet that demand on the other.

The challenge of initiating the review process will typically fall to the existing state higher education agency or to a specially established non-governmental entity. Even though it may be difficult initially to get visible and forceful commitments from the state's political leadership, their willingness to be personally involved will be critical to long-term success. The ability of the initiative to gain support will depend greatly on:

- Clearly presenting information to make a compelling case for the gap between demands and capacity, showing the implications for the future of the state and the need for strategies to narrow this gap.

- Respected, highly visible leaders being willing to speak out about the issues.

- Engaging a deliberate strategy, through the media, community forums, and other mass communication means to engage the public in the debate.

This policy evaluation is distinct from the strategic or master planning process undertaken by the state's higher education board and by the individual colleges and universities. The intent is to raise issues that the existing entities either cannot or will not raise. The objective is a long-term policy framework within which established agencies and institutions can function. Such a comprehensive evaluation should be guided by the following principles:

1. **Frame the review by the societal ends toward which state higher education policies are directed**. A goal such as "raising the education attainment of the population" or "making significant progress in the education achievement of specific target populations" would communicate more clearly and be more appropriate than "improving undergraduate education." The key is to frame the ends in terms of societal needs, not solely in terms of higher education's internal priorities.

2. **Undertake the review every 8 to 12 years** (more frequent reviews, unless dictated by crisis, can be unnecessarily destabilizing). Less frequent reviews can lead to conditions in which state higher education agencies accumulate so many regulatory roles through years of governmental action that they lose their effectiveness.

3. **Take a long-term perspective** — deliberately bridging terms of major political leaders and budget cycles.

4. Base the review on **quantitative and qualitative** analysis of demographic, education and economic trends, policies and policy implementation.

5. Organize the review to **ensure a degree of independence** from, yet to engender the confidence of, the current political leadership and the existing state higher education coordinating and governing structure.

6. **Encompass all higher education sectors,** public and private, and take into consideration linkages with the K-12 system, workforce and employer-based training.

7. Consider policies of **all dimensions of state government,** not only the higher education policies.

8. Engage the general **public and major non-education stakeholders** (business, corporate and civic leaders) in the debate about ends, strategies and policy choices.

9. Involve, but not be dominated by, a **cross-section of the state's higher education community** — board members, presidents, faculty and students.

Several lessons emerge from this project to guide states as they design a periodic long-range evaluation process. First, use information to define the issues and shape the debate. Quantitative and qualitative information are central to an initiative's ability to rise above the short-term, interest-group dominated, inwardly-directed focus characteristic of many state policy debates. For example, without information placing the educational needs of under-served populations in a statewide perspective, the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

discussion among institutional leaders inevitably shifts to the efficacy of specific campus initiatives without a sense of how these add up to a coherent statewide strategy. Because of the complexity of statewide policy considerations, little progress can be made simply by convening groups to frame issues and formulate alternatives. Sharing of inaccurate or incomplete information simply leads to inaccurately defined issues and inappropriate policy alternatives. The issues may not be known, and information is important; it educates participants and provides a common, objective foundation for discussions.

It is difficult to shift the state-level debate from means to ends without the context of information about the state's population, economy and educational needs, and about public opinion.

Environment scans are one technique for providing relevant information in accessible forms. Typically, scans highlight information on:

- Major international, national and regional trends that will impact the state's higher education system.

- In-state trends, focusing in particular on a public as opposed to an institutional perspective. Demographic, economic, political and educational trends, with attention to major in-state regional variations should be a priority.

- Public-opinion polling. Results of national polls as well as polls commissioned in conjunction with major state change projects show significant differences between the public and "expert" views of higher education issues. Because major policy change depends heavily on the support of political leaders, an accurate definition of public perceptions will be critical to a project's long-term success.

Policy reviews can provide an objective basis for assessing the match or mismatch of current policies with the ends that state leaders seek. The results can also provide an objective basis for design and implementation of future policy. Several lessons emerged from use of policy review process:

- The policy review process should be both bottom-up and top-down. Both the institutional and the state/system perspectives are important. Simply to gather institutional concerns — and complaints — will give inadequate attention to legitimate state and system concerns about statewide issues and public accountability. Conversely, to obtain only the state perspective about original intent and impact will ignore many of the subtle points about the actual impact of state policy on institutional change.

- The process should give careful attention to informal as well as formal policy. The key dimensions of expectations, culture and environment can often be much more powerful influences on change than formal policy actions.

- Both state and institutional representatives should be included in the process. Their involvement in the design and carrying out of the review will increase the chances that the results will be received and used.

- The final, integrated report should be presented not as a summative evaluation but as a beginning point for further discussion and framing of policy alternatives. By definition, these reports will imply criticism of key stakeholders. It is important not to put these individuals on the defensive. The aim is to raise the sense of possibility that alternative, more effective strategies can be pursued.

Focus groups, in addition, can impart information to the public (from the environmental scans and policy reviews) as well as to seek views about the public's values or criteria for making policy judgments about the major issues facing the state. Focus groups can be a key to efforts to build or test consensus about issues and policy choices when they involve a cross-section of the state's population, particularly outside of higher education. Similar processes can also be used to engage key higher education constituents (e.g., students, faculty, presidents or board members).

A synthesis of information from the environmental scans, policy reviews and focus groups can then be used to define a limited number (four to eight) major strategic themes facing the state. To be most effective, these themes need to:

- Focus on state conditions that should change — on the ends toward which policy should be directed, not on the means to address the issues. If possible, they should be stated in terms that will have meaning to key non-education stakeholders.

- Assess the relationship between the current distribution of resources and capacity (institutions, programs, etc.) and future state needs.

- Shape a public dialogue about the future of the state's higher education system and the policy choices that must be made.

One consistent barrier to long-term, systemic policy change was the lack of mechanisms or "places" in the state policy process through which fundamental questions about future policies can be raised, and where the communications gap between and among key stakeholders can be narrowed. As a result, "risk-avoidance" agendas, defined by short-term political agendas and budget cycles, dominate the scene. State leaders often say something like the following: "I am deeply concerned about this issue and feel that something must be done. But I and my agency cannot risk raising the issue. If you could find a way to raise the issue, it would be a great benefit, and we then could act."

The type and location of an entity that can perform an independent "third-party" role can only be determined on a state-by-state basis. Generally, such entities have the following characteristics:

- Statewide, nonpartisan, public-interest perspective. Try to avoid "representative" bodies; as an alternative, use extensive consultation with interested groups as an alternative.

- A sufficiently long charter to allow it to initiate policy change as well as monitor the first implementation steps. In most cases, the process should extend beyond single legislative sessions or budget cycles.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- A willingness, if not prior commitment, to go out of business when the task is completed.

A number of states have used a blue-ribbon commission, appointed by the governor and/or legislature, or an interim legislative study committee for these evaluations. Such bodies can be severely limited by the limited time periods for their work, the political agendas that caused them to be appointed and the "representative" nature of their membership. Another alternative is a special task force or commission formed by the existing state higher education agency or board. In such a case, the entity should be structured to ensure independence and credibility apart from the sponsoring body.

Broaden the Array of Policy Scenarios and Choices

Creative thinking is essential to inform and broaden debate on policy options. New visions about the role of government in stimulating and supporting long-term change are unlikely to emerge from discussions about existing policies among current stakeholders. External resources may be helpful to new thinking, and several suggestions may be beneficial:

1. Base scenarios and policy alternatives on the information gathered from the environmental scan and the policy review. In other words, the policy options should be connected directly to the realities facing the state and should not simply be ideas imported from elsewhere.

2. Consider the full range of potential policy tools available for government action: economic markets, political markets, rational planning, mixed public-private systems, financing, governance, accountability.

3. Stress both new ideas in policy design as well as implementation. Many well-designed policies founder because of poor implementation.

4. Recognize that what is often needed is not new or more policy but better coordination and implementation of existing policies. Guard against policy "fads" that may not match the state's unique needs, culture or traditions.

5. Distinguish between "policy churning" to give the appearance of change and policy change that is likely to have a lasting effect on the environment for change.

Credible, independent professional staff direction and capacity is basic to an initiative's success. Attempts to rely on staff with ongoing commitments to existing agencies will likely mean that the day-to-day, operational (and sometimes political) concerns of those agencies will consume staff energies.

For certain elements of the process, external perspectives and support can be especially helpful. The policy review process, for example, requires a high degree of objectivity regarding both state and institutional perspectives that may be difficult to find within the staffs of many state agencies. Also, external leadership of the environmental scan can provide breadth and a comparative perspective. Above all, an external resource can "confront the state with its own reality" in a way that agency staff

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

may not be able or wish to do. External staffing, however, is not an effective substitute for core in-state staffing.

Even if successful in raising the issue at some point (as the result of a major report, in a political campaign, in a legislative session, etc.), a change initiative must sustain momentum over several years. For example, states might consider strategies for dealing with this challenge which include policy changes that deliberately support incremental change at the lowest units of the system. Top-down, massive reforms tend to lead to short-term splash and long-term resistance and failure. A "third-party" entity, functioning outside of government and higher education system, can be used to (1) monitor and report on the progress of policy implementation; (2) keep the public informed and engaged in the debate; and (3) serve as a "constructive irritant" to spur the higher education enterprise to respond to external, societal priorities.

In the long-term, however, neither a periodic evaluation initiative nor a non-governmental "third-party" can substitute for the policy leadership responsibilities of the formal state higher education entities. Shaping the roles and responsibilities of those entities to strengthen their capacity is, in the end, the most important step in achieving sustained, system policy leadership.

How to affect positively the quality of undergraduate education will continue to be a major concern of state policymakers in the coming decade. The difficulties faced in addressing this issue are similar to those likely to be faced with other high priority concerns involving education. The framework for examining the impact of state policy on undergraduate education is one approach; but whether this approach or another is used, the underlying message is that substantial changes cannot be accomplished without considering the impact of policy on the higher education system as a whole. Without supportive state policies, colleges and universities will find it difficult to undertake the internal restructuring that will be necessary to meet the challenges of the coming decade.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ENDNOTES

1. Clark Kerr, "The States and Higher Education: Changes Ahead," *The Great Transformation in Higher Education*, 1960-1980 (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991).

2. Peter Ewell, *Assessment and the "New Accountability": Challenge for Higher Education's Leadership* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States [ECS], 1990).

3. Peter T. Ewell, Joni Finney and Charles Lenth, "Filling in the Mosaic: The Emerging Pattern of State-Based Assessment," *AAHE Bulletin*, vol. 42, no. 8 (April 1990), pp. 3-5.

4. Robert O. Berdahl and Susan M. Studds, *The Tension of Excellence and Equity* (College Park, MD: National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance, 1989).

5. Peter T. Ewell, "Assessment and Public Accountability: Back to the Future," *Change*, vol. 23, no. 6, pp. 12-15.

6. Elaine El-Khawas, *Campus Trends* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1992).

7. Sandra S. Ruppert, ed., *Charting Higher Education Accountability: A Sourcebook on State-Level Performance Indicators* (Denver: ECS, June 1994). See also Rhonda M. Epper, ed., *Focus on the Budget: Rethinking Current Practice* (Denver, CO: State Higher Executive Officers [SHEEO] and ECS, May 1994).

8. John K. Folger and Dennis P. Jones, *The Use of Financing Policy to Achieve State Objectives* (Denver, CO: ECS, 1993).

9. Peter T. Ewell, *Developing Statewide Performance Indicators for Higher Education: Policy Themes and Variations* (Denver, CO: ECS, 1994). The need to reallocate base funding began to be questioned more critically in the early 1990s.

10. Alene Bycer Russell, *Faculty Workload: State and System Perspectives* (Denver, CO: SHEEO and ECS, 1992).

11. Dennis P. Jones and Peter T. Ewell, "The Effect of State Policy on Undergraduate Education" (Denver, CO: ECS, 1992).

12. Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," *Wingspread Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2, (Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation, June 1987).

13. Richard F. Elmore, *Complexity and Control: What Legislators and Administrators Can Do About Implementing Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1980).

14. John Immerwahr with Steve Farkas, *The Closing Gateway: Californians Consider Their Higher Education System* (San Jose, CA: California Higher Education Policy Center, September 1993). See also "Colorado Looks at Higher Education," a poll prepared for AGENDA 21 (Boulder, CO: Talmey-Drake Research & Strategy, Inc., February 1994).

APPENDIX A

AUDIT OF POLICIES AFFECTING "GOOD PRACTICE" IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Institution Undertaking Audit:_____

Description of Innovation/Change Attempted:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Areas of Undergraduate Education Practice in Which Improvement Is Sought Through This Change (check all that apply):

1. High Expectations _____
2. A Coherent Curriculum _____
3. Synthesizing Experiences _____
4. Integrating Education and Experience _____
5. Active Learning _____
6. Ongoing Practice of Learned Skills _____
7. Assessment and Prompt Feedback _____
8. Collaborative Learning _____
9. Considerable Time on Task _____
10. Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Knowing _____
11. Frequent Student-Faculty Contact _____
12. Other (Describe) _____

_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In attempting to implement the innovation/change described above, what factors were found to be supportive of, or impediments to, your efforts? (Indicate support by +,++, or +++, impediments by —,— —, or — — — and no effect by "0.")

Supporting/Impeding Factors Mediating Influences	Nature of Effect
A. Institutional Culture	_____
1. Sense of Mission/Shared Purposes	_____
2. Clear Statement of General Education Requirements	_____
3. Policies and Practices Consistent with Purposes	_____
• Criteria for Faculty Hiring	_____
• Promotion and Tenure	_____
• Allocation of Discretionary Resources	_____
• Course Approval Processes	_____
• Review of General Education Curricula	_____
4. Institutional Processes for Self-Examination	_____
• Processes for Assessing General Education	_____
• Processes for Assessing Major Field	_____
• Communication of Assessment Results	_____
• Action Taken as a Result of Assessment	_____
5. Institution is "Student-Centered"	_____
• Faculty Emphasis on Undergraduate Education	_____
• Availability of Student Services	_____
• Students Treated as "Customers"	_____
6. Other (Describe)	_____
B. Institutional Resources	
1. Adequacy Overall	_____
2. Distribution -- Allocation to Undergraduate Education	_____
State Conditions	
A. Political Culture	_____
B. Governance/Structure	_____

C. Policies	System-Level	State-Level
• Mission Definition/Master Planning	_____	_____
• Institutional Licensure	_____	_____
• Admissions	_____	_____
• Program Approval/Review	_____	_____
• Accountability	_____	_____
• Financial/Resource Allocation	_____	_____
• Credit Transfer/Articulation	_____	_____
• Other (Specify)	_____	_____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

OTHER RELATED SPCL PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

Armajani, Babak, Richard Heydinger and Peter Hutchinson. *A Model for the Reinvented Higher Education System.* Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and State Higher Education Executive Officers. Publication No. PS-94-1, January 1994.

Chance, William. *The Policy Environment for Higher Education in Washington State (A Working Paper).* Education Commission of the States. PS-94-6, June 1994.

Education Commission of the States. *1994 State Postsecondary Structures Handbook.* Publication No. PS-94-3, June 1994.

Ewell, Peter and Dennis Jones. *The Effect of State Policy on Undergraduate Education.* Publication No. PS-92-5. Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, March 1993.

Epper, Rhonda and James R. Mingle, eds. *Focus on the Budget: Rethinking Current Practice.* Contributors: Brenda Albright, Mark Bateman, Kent Caruthers, Roger Elliott, Diane Gilleland, Joseph Marks, Kathleen Sell and Kenneth Walker. Publication No. PS-94-2. Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and State Higher Education Executive Officers, May 1994.

Folger, John and Dennis Jones. *Using Fiscal Policy to Achieve State Education Goals.* Publication No. PS-93-1. Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, August 1993.

Heydinger, Richard B. and Hassan Simsek. *An Agenda for Reshaping Faculty Productivity.* Publication No. PS-92-3. Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and State Higher Education Executive Officers, November 1992.

Jordan, Stephen M. and Daniel T. Layzell. *A Case Study of Faculty Workload Issues in Arizona: Implications for State Higher Education Policy.* Publication No. PS-92-2. Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and State Higher Education Executive Officers, November 1992.

Richardson, Richard C., Jr. *Creating Effective Learning Environments.* Publication No. PS-92-4. Published by the Education Commission of the States, March 1993.

Ruppert, Sandra S. (editor). *Charting Higher Education Accountability: A Sourcebook on State-Level Performance Indicators.* Contributors: Peter Ewell, Dennis P. Jones, Richard C. Richardson, Jr., Sandra S. Ruppert, Gordon B. Van de Water. Education Commission of the States. Publication No. PS-94-5, 1994.

Ruppert, Sandra S. *Charting Higher Education Accountability: The Roots and Realities of State-Level Performance Indicators.* Education Commission of the States. Publication No. PS-94-4, 1994.

Russell, Alene Bycer. *Faculty Workload: State and System Perspectives.* Publication No. PS-92-1. Published jointly by Education Commission of the States and State Higher Education Executive Officers, November 1992.

ECS PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM			
Publication Number and Title	Price	Quantity	Total
PS-94-1, *A Model for the Reinvented Higher Education System*	$7.50		$
PS-94-2, *Focus on the Budget: Rethinking Current Practice*	$11.00		$
PS-94-3, *1994 State Postsecondary Structures Handbook*	$22.00		$
PS-94-4, *Charting Higher Education Accountability: The Roots and Realities of State-Level Performance Indicators*	$7.50		$
PS-94-5, *Charting Higher Education Accountability: A Sourcebook on State-Level Performance Indicators*	$15.00		$
PS-94-6, *The Policy Environment for Higher Education in Washington State*	$6.50		$
PS-94-7, *A Framework for Evaluating State Policy Roles in Improving Undergraduate Education: Stimulating Long-Term Systemic Change*	$5.00		$
PS-93-1, *Using Fiscal Policy to Achieve State Education Goals*	$6.50		$
PS-92-1, *Faculty Workload: State and System Perspectives*	$7.50		$
PS-92-2, *A Case Study of Faculty Workload Issues in Arizona: Implications for State Higher Education Policy*	$5.50		$
PS-92-3, *An Agenda for Reshaping Faculty Productivity*	$5.50		$
PS-92-4, *Creating Effective Learning Environments*	$6.50		$
PS-92-5, *The Effect of State Policy on Undergraduate Education*	$6.00		$
Subtotal			$
+ Postage and handling*			$
TOTAL			$

*Postage and handling charges: Up to $10.00, $2.50; $10.00-$25.00, $4.25; $25.01-$50.00, $5.75; $50.01-$75.00, $8.50; $75.01-$100.00, $10.00; over $100.00, $12.00.

Generous discounts are available for bulk orders of single publications. They are: 10-24 copies, 10% discount; 25-49 copies, 20% discount; and 50+ copies, 30% discount.

We honor purchase orders and we accept prepaid orders; no credit cards. If you have questions concerning ECS publications, contact our Distribution Center at 303-299-3692. You may fax purchase orders to 303-296-8332. Make checks payable to **EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES.**

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Send this form the **ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427.**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE